

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 3737

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: AS, PGOV

SUBJECT: ANALYSIS OF EDITORIAL/PRESS REACTIONS TO
CAIRNS' APPOINTMENT

TOKYO FOR DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY SNEIDER

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

REF: A) CANBERRA 3728; B) STATE 126993

1. REFTEL A PRESENTED UNCLASSIFIED ACCOUNT OF PRESS
COMMENTS ON NEW AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT, ESPECIALLY
APPOINTMENT OF CAIRNS AS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER. FOL-
LOWING IS CLASSIFIED MISSION ANALYSIS:

2. FOR SEVERAL WEEKS BEFORE CAUCUS ELECTIONS, THERE WAS
EXTENSIVE PRESS SPECULATION AS TO WHETHER CAIRNS OR
BARNARD WOULD BE NAMED DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER BY THE
CAUCUS. MANY ARTICLES MENTIONED WHITLAM'S EFFORTS TO
RALLY SUPPORT FOR BARNARD WITH MOST PREDICTING THAT
BARNARD WOULD MAKE IT NARROWLY, THANKS TO WHITLAM'S
BACKING. EDITORIALS DURING THIS PERIOD GAVE CREDIT TO
CARINS FOR HIS PERFORMANCE AS TRADE MINISTER, BUT
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CRITICIZED HIS TENDENCY TO COMMENT ON FOREIGN-DEFENSE

AFFAIRS THAT WERE NOT MATTERS WITHIN HIS PORTFOLIO AND WHICH WERE EMBARRASSING TO THE GOVERNMENT, BY IMPLICATION IN ITS RELATIONS WITH THE US. BARNARD WAS DEPICTED AS A LONG-TIME, LOYAL FRIEND OF WHITLAM, A DEDICATED AND COLORLESS MINISTER AND SOMETHING OF A NONENTITY. AT A TIME WHEN WHITLAM WAS WIDELY CRITICIZED FOR ARROGANCE AND TAKING THINGS INTO HIS OWN HANDS WITHOUT CONSULTING CAUCUS, BARNARD WAS SEEN AS NOT SUPPLYING THE REQUIRED COUNTERWEIGHT TO WHITLAM.

3. CAIRNS' ACTUAL ELECTION AS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER WAS WIDELY APPROVED. THERE WAS LITTLE CRITICISM EVEN IN EDITORIALS OF PAPERS THAT HAD BEEN MILDLY CRITICAL BEFORE THE FACT. A PRINCIPAL REASON FOR THIS SHIFT SEEMS TO BE THAT DURING THE THREE DAYS IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING THE CAUCUS ELECTION WHITLAM HAD MET WITH THE PREMIERS OF AUSTRALIA'S SIX STATES. HE HAD TAKEN SUCH A HARD LINE WITH THEM ON BUDGETARY ISSUES THAT HE LEFT SEVERAL PERMIERS, ESPECIALLY DUNSTAN, LABOR PERMIER OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA, WITH THEIR BACKS UP. MANY MEMBERS OF CAUCUS WERE REPORTEDLY CONCERNED BY THE POSSIBILITY OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND NEGATIVE PUBLIC REACTION RESULTING FROM THE PM'S AUSTERITY POLICY. THE EVENTS OF THOSE THREE DAYS UNDERSCORED GRAPHICALLY THE WAY WHITLAM MADE DECISIONS ON HIS OWN WITHOUT CONSULTING HIS PARLIAMENTARY COLLEAGUES. ALL THIS HELPED CAIRNS, TO JUDGE FROM THE EDITORIALS AND OTHER COMMENTS, BECAUSE HE WAS SEEN AS AMAN CLOSE TO HIS PARLIAMENTARY COLLEAGUES, ESPECIALLY THE BACKBENCHERS, AND AS JUST THE KIND OF COUNTERBALANCING FORCE THAT IS NEEDED AT THE TOP OF THE GOVERNMENT. IT WAS FELT THAT CAIRNS WOULD EFFECTIVELY STAND UP FOR THE VIEWS OF CAUCUS AND RANK AND FILE LABOR PARTY MEMBERS VIS-A-VIS WHITLAM AND REASSERT THE AUTHORITY OF THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PEOPLE AS OPPOSED TO THE SPECIAL ADVISORS AND COMMISSIONS WHICH HAD EXERCISED EXCESSIVE INFLUENCE.

4. A NUMBER OF EDITORIALS COMMENTED UPON CAIRN'S WORK-MANLIKE PERFORMANCE AS MINISTER OF FOREIGN TRADE AND THE FACT THAT BUSINESS SPOKESMEN PUBLICLY WELCOMED HIS ELECTION AS DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER. OBVIOUSLY, THE
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"SOCIALIST" BOGEY WAS NOT BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY BY LEADERS OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR WHO FELT CAIRNS WAS A MAN THEY COULD WORK WITH. (IN RECENT STATEMENTS CAIRNS HAS DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS A SOCIALIST COMMITTED TO TRANSFORMING AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY GRADUALLY OVER MANY YEARS THROUGH EXERCISE OF REASON AND PERSUASION.)

5. INFLUENTIAL WEEKLY "NATIONAL TIMES" DEVELOPED THEME

THAT CAIRNS WAS A POLITICIAN WHOSE THINKING WAS AHEAD OF HIS TIME, AND NOW AUSTRALIA WAS "CATCHING UP WITH CAIRNS". THIS ANALYSIS OF COURSE ADDS STATURE TO CAIRNS AND TO THE VIEWS HE MAY HENCEFORTH EXPRESS.

6. MOST COMMENTATORS REGARD ELEVATION OF CAIRNS, RETENTION OF MURPHY AS GOVERNMENT LEADER IN SENATE, AND ADDITION OF JOHN WHEELDON TO CABINET AS SHIFT TO THE LEFT. HOWEVER, THIS LEFTWARD SHIFT IS VIEWED AS LESS SIGNIFICANT THAN THE NEW COUNTERBALANCE TO WHITLAM'S AUTONOMY AND FREEDOM OF ACTION.

7. AFTER HIS ELECTION THERE WAS NO EDITORIAL CONCERN SHOWN NOR EVEN MENTIONED OF CAIRN'S FOREIGN POLICY VIEWS. AND NO REFERENCE TO THE POSSIBLE REACTION IN WASHINGTON (WITH EXCEPTION OF BRIAN TOUHEY'S ARTICLE ON SECURITY CLEARANCES, REPORTED PREVIOUSLY). WHILE BROADLY FAVORABLE TO CAIRNS AND WELCOMING HIS ELECTION, SEVERAL EDITORIALS DID WARN THAT HE WOULD HAVE TO ACCEPT THE DISCIPLINE OF HIS NEW RESPONSIBILITY AND WOULD NOT HAVE THE LIBERTY TO SPEAK OUT HIS OWN PERSONAL VIEWS SINCE HENCEFORTH WHAT HE SAYS WILL BE IN THE NAME OF THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT.

8. THAT, OF COURSE, INVOLVES WISHFUL THINKING BECAUSE CAIRNS WILL UNDOUBTEDLY CONTINUE TO MAKE COMMENTS ON FOREIGN POLICY AND DEFENSE ISSUES THAT GO BEYOND WHAT MOST AUSTRALIANS FEEL, NOTABLY THEIR CONTINUING (THOUGH DIMINISHED) REGARD FOR THE UNITED STATES AND OTHER WESTERN FRIENDS OF AUSTRALIA.

9. CAIRNS' APPOINTMENT OCCURS AT A TIME OF RISING AUSTRALIAN NATIONALISM AND DESIRE TO ASSERT ITS OWN INDEPENDENT VOICE IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS. IT ALSO IS A TIME WHEN AUSTRALIANS
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ARE REACTING TO INVOLVEMENT IN THE VIETNAM WAR; AND A LACK OF PERCEIVED THREAT FROM ABROAD TENDS TO MAKE US-AUSTRALIAN RELTIONS LESS VITAL IN AUSTRALIAN EYES. CURRENT WIDELY FEATURED ARTICLES IN THE PRESS, SUCH AS THE GENERAL MACARTHUR MEMOIRS CRITICIZING AUSTRALIS'S FIGHTING PROWESS, TAD SZULC'S PIECE ON VIETNAM NEGOTIATIONS, AND PRENNIAL ACCOUNTS OF WATERGATE DO NOT HELP. ONE WOULD HOPE THAT AUSTRALIA COULDSOMEHOW BE SHAKEN OUT OF ITS MOOD OF COMPLACENCY AND INATTENTION TO SOME OF THE BROADER REALITIES. UNTIL THIS HAPPENS, THERE IS LITTLE REASON TO EXPECT A SIGNIFICANT REVERSAL IN CURRENT TRENDS.
GREEN

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